

Nuclear energy no panacea

ANNE LINDSEY

THERE'S a lot of incomplete information to unpack in *Ready to go nuclear* (*Free Press*, Dec. 13). It's unfortunate that the nuclear industry's PR machine continues to mislead the media and the public.

First, we should be clear that small modular reactors aren't significant contributors to energy grids, anywhere in the world. Sometimes referred to as "power point reactors," they are all stuck in the design stage. Even the BWRX 300 reactors recently approved for Ontario have never been built or tested. Star Core's reactor design being touted for Pinawa is just that — a design, not a proven or known quantity.

The federal government and the provinces that are investing billions in small modular reactor technology are acting like venture capitalists, taking a massive risk with taxpayers' and ratepayers' money. So far, Manitoba has resisted the nuclear bandwagon, for which we should all be grateful.

Second, industry and governments are also spending big to convince Canadians anxious about climate change that nuclear is a panacea as we move to electrify our economies. It's not.

Repeatedly, studies show that new nuclear builds and refurbishments of aging reactors are the most expensive form of electricity generation. Ontario's bet on nuclear is increasing the cost of electricity in that province by 29 per cent. Nuclear is also the slowest option to come online, taking years if not decades to build while fossil fuel emissions continue to rise. A worldwide history of delays and cost overruns is documented by the World Nuclear Industry Status Report. We are in an emergency to reduce emissions. When faster, cheaper and more reliable options for replacing fossil electricity are already available, we can't afford the luxury of waiting for nuclear.

Jurisdictions all over the planet are leaping ahead with renewable energy

options like wind, solar and storage, along with energy efficiency, driving costs down. Climate Action Team Manitoba's recent report shows this province has remarkable opportunities in all these areas. We should be taking advantage of them.

Turning to waste and decommissioning was touched on, but incompletely, in the article. Yes, there is a plan to bury Pinawa's old WR-1 reactor in cement on the banks of the Winnipeg River. Such a manner of decommissioning has never happened in Canada, and only very rarely elsewhere. The International Atomic Energy Agency considers it an option of last resort.

Even without the fuel waste, the reactor and all its components became radioactive over the operating period, rendering the building itself de facto radioactive waste. How do Manitobans feel about a nuclear waste dump on the Winnipeg River? This plan's regulatory review has been underway since 2017 while experts wrangle over the exact nature of the radionuclides present in the reactor building.

And yes, Pinawa's high-level fuel waste is being transported on our highways to a temporary storage site on the Ottawa River, with no opportunity for public input or the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous nations along the route.

Canadian Nuclear Laboratories is the proponent of this plan, and in charge of the Pinawa cleanup, along with management of all AECL legacy waste and nuclear liabilities. The contract under which CNL operates was recently handed over by Ottawa to a U.S.-led consortium whose members and subcontractors have extensive ties to the nuclear weapons establishment. At \$1.2 billion per year, for a possible length of 12 years, this may be the most expensive government contract ever awarded in Canada.

Many do not realize that through the so-called Manhattan Project, Canada supplied the plutonium and uranium for the bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There continue to be pervasive interconnections between military and civilian uses of nuclear power despite international treaties and safeguards.

Readers should also know the deep geological repository for Canada's nuclear

fuel waste “near Ignace” referenced in the article has not yet been built. The proposal faces years of regulatory review and is the subject of legal action by Eagle Lake First Nation, who were not properly consulted about the project on their traditional territory.

Star Core and Pinawa’s request for government funding for an untested reactor in Manitoba is only a small part of the veritable avalanche of nuclear developments being proposed and propped up by governments across Canada. The industry’s full story is rarely revealed and is inadequately scrutinized for its far-reaching impacts on the environment, Indigenous rights, health and the economy. With so many non-fossil energy options available, Manitoba (and Canada) would do well to avoid the nuclear fantasy.

Anne Lindsey has been monitoring nuclear waste since the 1980s.

[Copyright \(c\)2025 winnipeg, Edition Winnipeg](#)

[Powered by TECNAVIA](#)